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Guest editors: Fran Bennett, Julia Brannen and Linda Hantrais (corresponding guest editor)

Reconceptualising co-residence in post-growth Japanese society

Misa Izuhara (Corresponding author), School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol,

8 Priory Road, Bristol, England, UK, BS8 1TZ

Email: M.Izuhara@bristol.ac.uk

Notes on contributor

Misa Izuhara is a Reader in Comparative Policy Research at the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, UK. Her research focusses on housing and social change, ageing and intergenerational relations, and comparative policy analysis across and beyond East Asian societies. She is the co-author of *Housing in post-growth society: Japan on the edge of social transition* (2018, Routledge) and editor of *Handbook on East Asian social policy* (Edward Elgar, 2013). She is co-editor of the peer-reviewed international *Journal of Social Policy*.

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Abstract

Three-generation co-residence, derived from the pre-war family system, was a common living arrangement among Japanese families until the proportion of nuclear family households became dominant in the period of economic growth following the Second World War. Financial affluence among ageing parents due to pensions and personal savings, and changes in lifestyle and attitudes, stimulated the growth of elderly-only households from the 1970s. In contemporary Japanese society, patterns of co-residence are changing again. Growing numbers of ageing parents are living with their unmarried adult children, largely due to precarious employment and falling marriage rates among the younger generation. In response to ultra-low fertility, population ageing and low economic growth, current policy discourse and initiatives are encouraging co-residence. Using Census data and attitudinal surveys, this article examines changing postwar patterns of co-residence, and conceptualises their shifting functions in post-growth Japan. While ‘de-familialisation’ underpinned the development of long-term care policy in the 1990s reducing the caring responsibilities of families by expanding services and provisions, current policy rhetoric and measures largely focus on ‘re-familialisation’. The article argues that policies encouraging a revival of co-residence through tax incentives and subsidies are, therefore, failing to address contemporary housing and fertility issues facing young adults.

Key words: intergenerational relations, co-residence, low fertility, social policy, housing, Japan

Introduction

Three-generation co-residence was the traditional living arrangement in Japan and many other East Asian societies until nuclear family living became popular during the period of economic and demographic growth from the late 1940s following the Second World War (Chen, 2005; Martin, 1990; Meguro, 1987; Ochiai, 2004). Urbanisation, changes in lifestyle, and financial affluence among older people as a result of pensions and personal savings were some of the reasons for the growth of nuclear households in this period, and the decline in three-generation co-residence between 1965 and 2015 (Cabinet Office, 2017; Izuhara, 2010; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015). Since the burst of the ‘bubble economy’ in the early 1990s, Japan has been experiencing a prolonged period of low or stagnant economic growth. Changing patterns of living arrangements mean that more unmarried post-youth adults are living with their ageing parents, largely as a result of the precarious labour market and the ‘second demographic transition’, characterised by stagnating marriage and fertility rates, and accompanied by greater autonomy for women (Lesthaeghe, 2010). In this context of post-growth society – in response to the social trends of low economic growth, low marriage rates, low fertility and the ageing of the population – current policy discourse and initiatives in Japan are also encouraging three-generation co-residence.

Using existing census and survey data, this article first presents conceptual understandings of shifting patterns of co-residence in Japan. It then examines the changes involved in this shift and the factors influencing it over the past three decades. When the trend of societal ageing first hit the headlines in the 1980s, changing household patterns, and the dramatic increase of elderly-only households in particular, generated a national discourse about future care needs in an aged society. The development of the Japanese long-term care insurance policy in 2000

was believed to encourage ‘de-familialisation’ since the caring responsibilities of families would be reduced by the provision of care by other sectors (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

Saraceno & Keck (2010) argue that a similar pattern is found in the European context: namely, the individualisation of social rights to care reduced family responsibilities and dependencies. In Japan, long-term care policy was designed deliberately so as not to reward family carers with cash benefits, but instead to promote the socialisation of care by expanding the provision of services in the community.

The decline in co-residence was part of the rationale behind the development of alternative care services. By contrast, current policy trends under the Abe administration have strongly emphasised individual and family responsibility in order to address both the low fertility of the younger generation and the growing care needs of the older generation. Some housing-related policies since the early 2010s have been promoting the revival of co-residence, encouraging generations in the same family to form three-generation households, or to live near one another, through tax concessions for renovations and subsidies for moving house. The expectation is that the sharing of resources within the wider family will lead to higher fertility and a higher female labour force participation rate, facilitating the activity of younger women in both production and reproduction. In addition, younger generations are expected to take care of their parent(s) more readily due to geographical proximity. In this article, we examine the gap between policy rhetoric and measures on the one hand, and the reality of contemporary co-residence on the other. In so doing, we aim to re-conceptualise the functions and meaning of co-residence in Japanese post-growth society.

Shifting functions and conceptions of co-residence

Co-residence – living in a private household with multiple members – is defined by the

UN/ECE (2006, p. 162) as a 'group of two or more persons who combine to occupy the whole or part of a housing unit and to provide themselves with food and possibly other essentials for living'. The Japanese Census differentiates between family and non-family co-residence households. Three-generation co-residence in Japan has legal roots that can be traced back to before the Second World War. Based on the patriarchal, patrilocal stem-family system known as *i'e* [family, house], the common arrangement was for older parents to live with their eldest son, his wife and their children, sometimes including their own unmarried adult children in the household (Ochiai, 2004). In the traditional family system, the paternal head of household held authority, observing the rule of one-son succession. 'Lineage' was an important concept as the family name, family business, family wealth and the family's social status were often passed on from generation to generation (Koyano, 1996; Nakane, 1972). Since family continuity was crucial, families without children adopted a child, and those without a son adopted a *yōshi* [son-in-law] not only as a marriage partner for their daughter but also as an inheritor of the assets and status of the family, including their surname and practices of ancestor worship. Co-residence was thus an integral part of the family system. Such a living arrangement structured interaction and strengthened family support mechanisms, providing both support and care for other members of the family (Lawton, Silverstein & Bengtson, 1994) and a mode of survival when alternative resources were limited.

This family system, together with the behaviour pattern and structure of families, was influenced by the East Asian values system known as Confucianism (Park & Cho, 1995), although considerable differences are found between the values and manifestations of the Confucian ethics across East Asian societies. For Japanese families, it is considered as an ethical rather than a religious principle, teaching moral virtues such as filial piety, respect for

seniority, faith in the state and in the intimate relationships of family and friends, and collective values instead of individualism. Although some scholars challenge the application of Confucianism to Japanese society (Ochiai & Johshita, 2014), the ideology, notably filial piety, had a significant influence on the moral obligation of family support and co-residence (Hashimoto & Ikels, 2005; Koyano, 1996). Postwar co-residence was bound by the concept of ‘moral capital’, which Silverstein and colleagues (2012, p. 1246) define as ‘the stock of internalised social norms that obligate children to care for and support their older parents’; accordingly, the ‘transmission of moral capital lies at the intersection of self-interest (for parents) and altruism (for children)’.

Socio-economic and legal changes following the Second World War brought a new structure and ideology of the family, as well as new roles for, and relationships within, Japanese families (Ochiai, 2004; Ueno, 1994). In the process of family democratisation, the concept of the patriarchal family was dismantled and removed from the new Constitution (1946), the new Civil Code (1947) and the Family and Inheritance Law (1948). The revised laws stressed the importance of individual rights and equality among family members regardless of their gender and birth order, at the expense of family continuity and cohesion. These legal changes were supported by significant economic growth, leading to subsequent changes in family values and practices including choice of marriage partners, while also facilitating the shift towards the nuclear family (Meguro, 1987).

The succession of the eldest son was a dominant practice in East Asia (Lin & Yi, 2013). The East Asian Social Survey shows that co-residence of unmarried sons and daughters (rather than married sons and daughters), and young and less educated adult children, with their parents has become a common phenomenon in the case study societies of China, Japan,

Korea and Taiwan. Married sons are more likely to live with their parents than are married daughters, although this practice has been changing. Variations are increasingly observed within the East Asian region: for example, older parents typically used to live with their eldest son, but in contemporary China the one-child policy has significantly jeopardised this practice. In contemporary societies with stagnated youth transitions, older parents may not become the primary recipients of family support but may instead continue to provide support to their adult children (Izuhara & Forrest, 2013). The driving forces and motivations behind the provision of intergenerational support, such as altruism, obligation and exchange, have also become more diverse and ambiguous (Horioka et al, 2018).

Under the new Civil Code in 1947, the legal definition of the family changed from the extended family of the paternal lineage to a nuclear family. The declining trend of three-generation co-residence in Japan can be explained by several factors. Nuclear-family-only households were products of the rapid economic growth of the early postwar period, as urbanisation led to greater geographical mobility of young people. As urbanisation accelerated, it produced different economic patterns of family life in which succession within the household had little functional meaning, especially in urban areas (Nakane, 1972). The majority of older people were still living with their adult children. However, the proportion of three-generation households was in constant decline, largely because economic progress brought urbanisation, economic power and shifts in value systems (Martin, 1990). Postwar housing policy facilitated the expansion of nuclear-family living through the provision of housing and loans. Before the policy reforms of the 2000s, state subsidies were available via the Government Housing Loan Corporation to support 'new families' in accessing home ownership. The supply of Public Housing Corporation housing ('nuclear family units') provided stepping stones (Hirayama, 2003). Co-residence formerly afforded many benefits to

the different generations within the family, structuring opportunities for the sharing of expenses as well as the provision and exchange of emotional, practical and personal support. The inevitable drawback was that the close proximity of different generations living together caused conflicts due to the lack of privacy, autonomy and independence. The expansion of independent living by older people from the 1980s onward was supported by the increase in real incomes and the development of social security provisions. The wealth that was brought about for older parents through their own incomes, personal savings and the establishment of pensions was one of the significant structural factors leading to their freedom to choose independent living (Izuhara, 2000).

The shift to the nuclear family did not, however, advance quickly and widely in the first half of the postwar period. The family system symbolised in multi-generational living arrangements is still prevalent in some families and communities in contemporary Japan. According to the 2015 Census, the proportion of three-generation households in relation to the total number of households was 17.8% in Yamagata, 15.0% in Fukui and 13.8% in Niigata, while the national average was 5.7% (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015). In some families, sons still feel morally obliged to live with their families as a duty belonging to them as the son, or as a practical proposition due as much to factors such as housing affordability and housing market constraints as to social norms, which continue to sustain co-residence in the contemporary context.

In post-growth Japanese society, however, co-residence is seeing a revival both in practice and in policy rhetoric and initiatives. Partly in response to the precarious labour market and the low marriage and fertility rates characteristic of the second demographic transition, new patterns of co-residence emerged following the post-‘bubble’ economic crisis in the late

1990s and were accentuated in the post-2008 period. Stagnating youth transitions include the difficulties found by young adults in achieving residential independence (Hirayama, 2017).

As more young adults remain single, and unmarried individuals remain in their parental home, the likelihood increases of two-generation co-residence without children, instead of three-generation living. Such new patterns of co-residence require the re-conceptualisation of the functions and meaning of conventional family co-residence in the post-growth context.

Changing patterns of co-residence

In the Japanese Population Census, ‘couple and child/ren living with both parents’ and ‘couple and child/ren living with one parent’ are two of the categories in the family household types representing traditional three-generation co-residence. While the number of such three-generation households was maintained during the first half of the postwar period until the 1980s (see Figure 1), their representation in the total number of households decreased dramatically, from 19% in 1965 to only 3.6% in 2015 (see Figure 2). The significant expansion of nuclear family households in the process of urbanisation was both a cause and a consequence of this shift. The decline in number and proportion was steady from the mid-1980s onward, but with wide urban–rural variations in household types. Three-generation co-residence is much more prevalent in rural Japan, where housing is on average more spacious, and marriage and birth rates are higher across the different age groups. For example, according to the 2015 Population Census, only 1.08% of households in Tokyo consisted of three-generation family households (couple and child/ren living with one or both parents), while the rate was significantly higher in more traditional rural prefectures such as Fukui (10.48%).

FIGURES 1 & 2 ABOUT HERE

The decline in the rate of co-residence is partly the result of the expansion of single-person and couple-only households. This trend is particularly noteworthy among households headed by older people, which now include the postwar baby-boomers. The expansion of elderly-only households occurred between 1975 and 2015 (see Figure 3). According to the Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions, in 1975 three-generation co-residence was a dominant household structure among older people aged 65 and over (54.4%) (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2015). The proportion of multi-generation households declined to a third of the total households with older members by 1995, and to a quarter by 2001. In 2015, only approximately 12% of households with members aged 65 or above lived in three-generation co-residence. By contrast, the proportion of elderly-only households, which was only 21.7% of total households in 1975, had increased to nearly 60% of households by 2017, consisting of either single older people or elderly-couple households. In 2016, the life expectancy of Japanese women was 86.99 years at birth, compared to 80.75 for men. Due to increasing longevity, particularly among women, the proportion of single-older-person households, many of them containing widowed women, increased from 8.6% in 1975 to 26.3% in 2015.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Another trend demonstrated in Figure 3 is the growing proportion of unmarried adult children living with their older parents. From less than 10% in 1975, it doubled over the next four decades. Stagnating youth transitions, and delayed residential independence and family formation, because of the prolonged economic recession since the late 1990s, are well documented (Miyamoto, 2004; Yamada, 2004). For example, the Big Issue Japan Foundation (2014) revealed that a clear majority (approximately 80%) of young adults aged 20–39 living in urban areas, and on a low income, earning less than 2 million yen per annum (13,333 GBP,

1 GBP = 150 JPY), lived with their parents. Delayed residential independence of young adults is probably due, at least in part, to the structural constraints of the low-growth economy and precarious labour market in addition to low marriage rates.

The strong link between marriage and new household formation is one of the most influential factors behind the increasing rate of two-adult generation co-residence in Japan. Residential independence (or new household formation) is closely associated with marriage (Hirayama & Izuohara, 2008); precarious labour market conditions also help to explain the decline in marriage, thereby directly influencing the rise in this contemporary type of co-residence. According to the 2010 Population Census, around two-thirds of unmarried people in their twenties still reside with their parents, and this arrangement continues for the age group in their thirties (58%).

Japanese population censuses show a high and growing rate of ‘life-time never-marrieds’. Those who have never married by the age of 50 are considered to stay single for life in Japanese cultural and statistical terms. The 2015 Population Census indicated that 23.37% of men and 14.06% of women fell into this category. In the same Census, 34.6% of women and 47.1% of men aged 30–34, and 23.9% and 35% of women and men respectively aged 35–39, were unmarried (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015). Of the 35–44 age group, 17% of unmarried individuals lived with their parent/s in 2015, an increase from only 2.2% in 1980. Moreover, 8.3% of co-resident unmarried people in the 35–44 age group were unemployed. The rate was much higher among those in their twenties. In a society where alternative affordable accommodation is lacking, co-residence provides an informal safety net for unmarried people with precarious employment at a time when their number is increasing. This trend has also been interpreted as one element of the second demographic transition

thesis, whereby in ‘familial’ welfare states young adults tend to leave home when they get married (unless they follow the traditional form of co-residence), while such residential independence occurs before marriage in societies with more generous state welfare systems (Lesthaeghe, 2010).

Furthermore, in Japan, unmarried parents (including divorced, separated and widowed parents), who, as elsewhere, are most likely to be unmarried mothers, tend to live with their parents in multi-generational households, although they do not fit the conventional definition of three-generation families as couples with children/parent(s), described above. Comparing the residential patterns of unmarried parents cross-nationally, striking differences have been found between the living arrangements of unmarried mothers in Japan and those in other countries (Kawata & Hirayama, 2010). Most Japanese unmarried mothers aged 25–54 (60.3%) lived with their parents, whereas the equivalent rate was less than 10% for Northern European societies, including 6.3% in England and Wales, 4.7% in Germany and 4.4% in Sweden. Even in Italy, a ‘familial’ state in Southern Europe, the proportion was less than 50%. This difference can be explained to some extent by cultural factors, such as social norms regarding the acceptability of intergenerational dependence, but to a greater extent it may be due to structural factors such as the lack of alternative accommodation in the public sector and social security benefits to support independent living for unmarried parents. Contrary to the expectation that employment helps lone-mother households out of poverty, the weakest link was observed for Japan in the OECD (2011) data. The employment rate among unmarried parents in Japan, reached 80%, but the poverty rate for unmarried mothers, at 59%, was also the highest among the 27 OECD countries (Tamiya, 2013).

Policy discourse and initiatives on co-residence

In Japan, intergenerational co-residence was a product of social norms and family reciprocity regarding the sharing of resources, including household finances, domestic chores and living space, when provision in other sectors of the state and the market was lacking. Post-growth Japanese society provides a different context, making living with parents an increasingly cost-effective option for young adults on low incomes. The 1990s were seen as the beginning of the post-growth society in Japan, with accelerated societal ageing driven by falling fertility and increased longevity. The end of the economic bubble in the early 1990s and subsequent recessions reduced tax revenue, making it increasingly difficult for the government to fund the level of expenditure needed to support the developing ‘super-aged’ society. Changes in household structure and in the role of families, who once played the central role in care provision, were further determinants of the policy shift regarding long-term care. Although structural changes do not necessarily undermine the functional aspects of family relations, the dramatic decline in three-generation households required different policy responses. While family carers themselves were ageing and periods of care were prolonged, the pool of informal carers was shrinking. The need for alternatives to respond to increasing care needs and to fill the gap left by contemporary families became an urgent item on the policy agenda during the 1990s. By the late 1990s, when the long-term care insurance law was passed – and 2000 when it was implemented as the fifth social insurance scheme – the trend in policy largely encouraged ‘de-familialisation’. The commodification of care, through the creation of the care market, was at the heart of the new scheme. In the process, the major issue was whether to reward family carers with cash benefits. The decision not to grant cash benefits to avoid tying women into an informal caring role differentiated the Japanese scheme from the German long-term care insurance model (Rothgang, 2010).

In the current post-growth, super-aged social context, ultra-low fertility has become a critical policy concern (Straughan, Chan & Jones, 2009; Gietel-Basten, 2018). As in many East Asian and European Union countries, the fertility rate in Japan has been falling. In 2016, it had reached 1.44 births per woman, a figure far below the population replacement level of 2.1. The year 2016 was significant as the year in which the number of births in Japan was, for the first time in the history of the census, recorded as being under one million. Boosting fertility is the key policy objective in post-growth Japan, if it is to maintain its goal of ‘100 million population for the next fifty years’ (Cabinet Office, 2016b). Prime Minister Abe’s administration generated a discourse about the ‘100 million, all active, society’ urging everyone, including women of reproductive age, to be active in every sphere of society. His rhetoric has underpinned various policy initiatives. In particular, it encourages women of reproductive age to have more children and to engage more with both paid and unpaid labour. The government focus underpinning the national fertility agenda makes explicit the need to revive co-residence.

Not only policy discourse but also housing policy initiatives in response to the second demographic transition are largely targeting familialisation and the promotion of traditional three-generation living arrangements, or two households living near each other, to facilitate the flow and volume of intergenerational support. The promotion of co-residence was evident in the outline measures approved by the Cabinet in March 2015 to cope with declining fertility (Cabinet Office, 2015). Couched in the neoliberal policy discourse of the small state, market reliance, enhanced self-help and individual responsibility, such policy initiatives were developed to meet the dual purposes of using family resources to provide informal care at home and to free women to participate in the labour market. A series of financial incentives

such as subsidies and tax concessions are currently offered for families that form co-resident households or move to live in close proximity to each other.

At the national level, in 2016 the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism started promoting two-generation households through subsidies and tax concessions for people who build or renovate energy-efficient housing suitable for contemporary co-residence. The Urban Renaissance Agency, formally known as the Urban Development Corporation, which provided public housing for new families, launched rent subsidy schemes in 2013 to enable different generations in one family to live in close proximity using their existing housing units. Many local government authorities also offer schemes including subsidies towards removal costs if households who relocate live together, or close to their ageing parents or adult children. In addition, market initiatives are being developed. For example, in the mid-1970s, a new product, known as ‘two-household housing’, was first introduced by Japanese housing construction companies in response to intergenerational conflicts in co-residence households caused when different generations of a family live in close physical proximity: typically, between an older mother and her daughter-in-law. Within the available space, new housing designs offer separate amenities and facilities under one roof, such as two separate kitchens, separate bathrooms or entrances, to accommodate different lifestyles, privacy and independence. Two-household housing is not like ‘semi-detached housing’ but designed for interaction, for example by having connecting internal doors. When access to individual home ownership became an unrealistic dream for many young couples in the bubble-economy period in the 1980s and early 1990s, the demand for, and the actual number of, housing constructions increased, peaking in the late 1990s. In the post-growth housing market since 2009, however, the declining, but sustained, demand for

two-household dwellings may not be motivated as much by the cost-sharing aspect as by the need for greater intimacy and (non-financial) intergenerational resource sharing.

As Hirayama (2016) argues, housing policy focussing exclusively on family resources, especially the promotion of traditional three-generation co-residence, is not likely to produce positive fertility outcomes. A significant implementation gap exists between the family-centred policy ideology and the reality of family lives in contemporary Japanese society. First, no causal link is found between nuclear households and low fertility, which would explain why promoting the co-residence of married couples with the older generation may not meaningfully address concerns about the low birth rate. The growth in the number of nuclear-family-only households has been a slow but consistent long-term trend, partly driven by the postwar housing policy centred on home ownership. However, those who marry tend to have children, as social norms still strongly oppose unmarried motherhood. Thus, falling fertility is likely to be in part at least caused by the growing number of unmarried individuals, as reported above.

The shift in attitudes is another factor helping to explain low birth rates and the decline in co-residence, as well as the failure of policy to reverse these trends. Little evidence is available to support pro-family policy based on three-generation co-residence because neither younger nor older generations express a strong preference for living together. An opinion survey on childrearing in families and communities (Cabinet Office, 2013) demonstrated that only 20.6% of respondents agreed that three-generation co-residence was an ‘ideal type of living arrangement’. Such rates were significantly lower for those aged 30–39, at 14.9% among male respondents and 10.7% among their female counterparts. Instead, more positive attitudes were observed among men and women in their thirties regarding living near to their

ageing parents but without sharing accommodation. Approximately half (50% of the male and 48.5% of the female sample) mentioned that this would be their preferred arrangement, while continuing to maintain their own household.

The evidence that is drawn upon to develop family policy to encourage three-generation co-residence often comes from specific rural contexts. Fukui is a rural prefecture located in the Chubu Region on Honshu Island facing the Sea of Japan. Fukui displays a distinctive pattern: it has a large number of three-generation households, while maintaining high female labour participation rates and high fertility rates. This combination is labelled the ‘Fukui model’ and has become a blueprint to underpin some fertility policy initiatives (Fujiyoshi, 2015).

Housing policy in Fukui has long promoted co-residence and generations living close to one another. According to the 2010 Population Census, this prefecture had the second highest rates of three-generation co-residence in Japan (17.6%), while the never-married rate for women at the reproductive ages of 30–34 was the second lowest in the whole country, at 28.4%. High marriage rates are combined with one of the highest fertility rates in Japan: 1.63 in Fukui Prefecture, compared to the national average of 1.45 in 2015. Fukui Prefecture also has the highest female labour force participation rate for women aged 16–64 in the country, at 76%, which is approximately ten percentage points higher than the rates in prefectures in the Kansai Region such as Nara, Hyogo and Osaka. Compared to the national average, women are less often engaged in primary industry but more likely to work in the manufacturing and service sectors in Fukui. A Cabinet Office report (2016a) found significant disparities across the regions in female labour force participation, which partly relate to variations in the availability of formal and informal childcare support and services. In Fukui Prefecture, childcare places per woman between the reproductive ages of 25–49 stood at 0.24, about

three times higher than the proportion of places in prefectures with the lowest rates, such as Nara (0.09).

It is often suggested that in Fukui prefecture traditional three-generation living could be the major influential factor explaining the highly productive female population in terms of both labour force participation and fertility rates. However, the strong social norms characteristic of an agriculture-based economy, together with the high prevalence of manufacturing industry, were and still are likely to be key factors driving married women to participate in the formal labour market. Although a strong association exists between co-residence, fertility and female labour force participation in this prefecture, it is also evident that working mothers in Fukui are very stretched by their multiple roles in paid and unpaid work. The 2015 Fukui Statistical Report demonstrated that economically active women in Fukui spent on average 32 minutes longer than the national average of 7 hours 20 minutes in total per day on paid and unpaid work, including caring for other family members. The discrepancy was only 7 minutes among their male counterparts (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2011).

Furthermore, what seems to ‘work’ in rural regions is often not easily transferable to large cities, where demographic changes are more acute, due to differences in lifestyles, the availability of services and the housing market. Low fertility is much more prevalent in large cities – for example, the fertility rate is only 1.17 in the capital city of Tokyo – in line with the extremely low marriage rates. The proportion of single-person households is also disproportionately high in Tokyo: 45.9%, compared to the national average of 32.4%, according to the 2010 Census. Housing is on average much more spacious in rural areas and can therefore more easily accommodate three-generation living. For example, the average

floor space for housing in rural prefectures such as Fukui, Miyagi and Yamagata was approximately 140m² compared to 67.7m² in Tokyo (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2013). The existing housing stock and high housing prices thus challenge the feasibility of promoting three-generation co-residence in urban areas. Limitations due to the size and cost of housing in the global city of Tokyo are clearly evident in its low rate of three-generation households.

The promotion of co-residence explicitly relies on an expectation that grandparents will provide informal child care. However, the promotion of grandparent care may not be relevant if low fertility is largely a result of people not getting married since, as already noted, in Japan it is those who are married who tend to have children (Kawamoto, 2001). Rather, the relevant issue is the increase in the number of women who are not having any children because they remain single. The assumption of informal childcare provision by grandparents is therefore another myth underlying the promotion of co-residence to boost fertility. The more limited availability of grandparents is another issue taken into consideration. As also observed in the UK and other European countries, grandparents are now facing a conflict between caring tasks and their own labour market participation (Kanji, 2017). The current economic climate and pension reforms are incentives for older people to extend their paid working life. If housing policy is to be more effective in addressing the fertility issue, it would need to provide greater support for young adults in their transition to adulthood and in their attempts to form an independent household separately from their parents.

Conclusions

In examining the decline in traditional three-generation co-residence in Japan, this article has identified a contemporary twist to this phenomenon. It has shown how an increasing number

of unmarried adult children remain in the parental home, as they struggle to make a successful transition to residential independence. Co-residence with parents used to be the duty of the eldest son in the pre-war period, but it has gradually shifted to become a moral obligation or a practical option for adult children more generally: the arrangement is not legally prescribed but is morally driven. It is also important to highlight the shift in the nature and function of contemporary co-residence. The fact that the frequency of two-generation adult co-residence is replacing traditional three-generation living also entails moral obligations on the part of the older generation. The current pattern, in which older parents continue to accommodate their adult children, means that the moral obligations of families have shifted to the older generation in post-growth Japan. This is partly because, given the economic cycle and their gains from the welfare system, the current older generation is better off, and therefore in a better position to provide support to their adult children. Those with the necessary means are helping to alleviate wealth inequality between the generations within the family. The filial piety of adult children respecting and caring for their ageing parents has been reversed: instead, the salient feature of contemporary family living in Japan is the prolonged dependence of adult children on their parents, at least regarding housing and financial resources.

In the economic and demographic climate of the 2000s, a common picture in advanced societies is of the older generation with more resources absorbing the new social risks facing the 'younger' generation, as the period of youth transitions is extended (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). In Japan, these new social risks relate largely to structural issues, such as the lack of affordable housing, in terms of both state and market provision, as well as the underdeveloped, and restricted, social security system. Linked to this phenomenon of prolonged youth dependence is the myth underlying the current policy rhetoric of boosting

fertility by the promotion of traditional three-generational co-residence. As argued in this article, policies to encourage married couples to co-reside with their parents may not produce a significant increase in fertility rates. Low fertility is found instead to be strongly linked to the recent stagnation of marriage rates. Support for young adults who may be remaining reluctantly in the parental home as they struggle to make residential transitions might therefore offer a more effective policy option.

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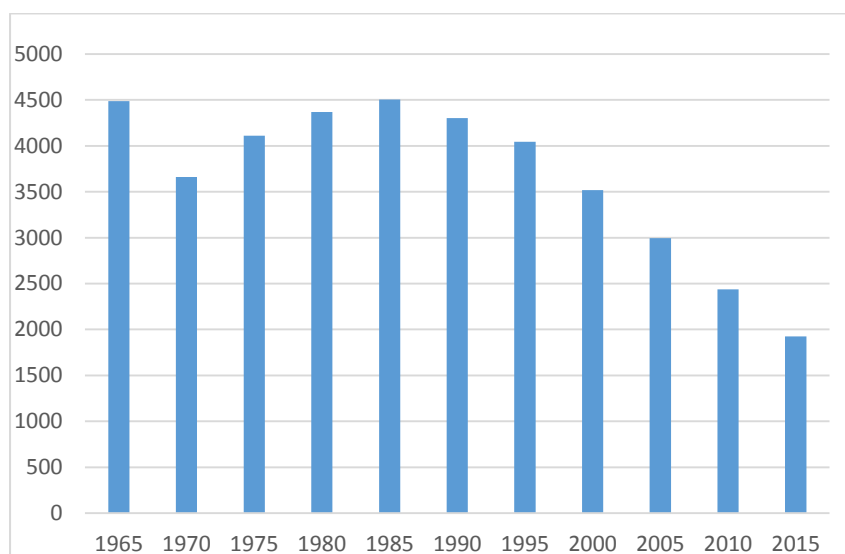
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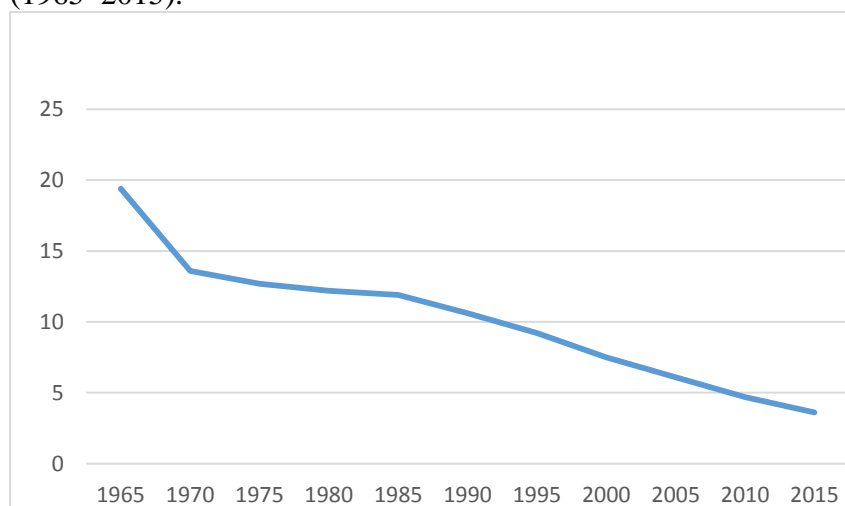
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Figure 1. Number of three-generational family households in Japan (000s) (1965–2015).



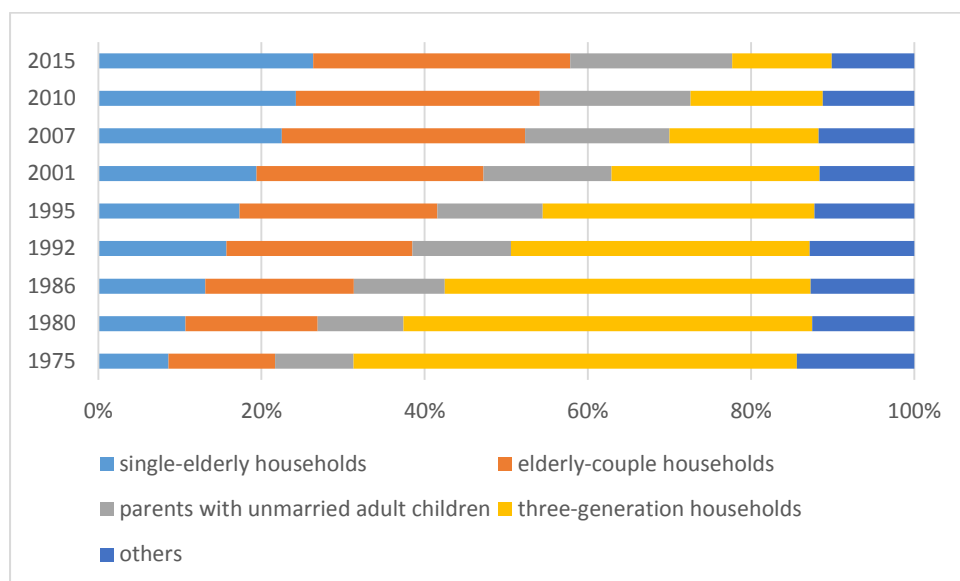
Source: Population Census of Japan 1965–2015.

Figure 2. Three-generational family households as a proportion of total households (in %) (1965–2015).



Source: Population Census of Japan 1965–2015.

Figure 3. Proportion of household types with members aged 65+ (1975–2015) (in %).



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2015).